

Congress of the United States
Washington, DC 20515

September 25, 2009

The Honorable Navin Patnaik
Chief Minister of Orissa State, India
Naveen Nivas,
Aerodrome Road,
Bhubaneswar,
Orissa 751001 India

Via facsimile: +91 674 2535100

Dear Chief Minister,

We write as Members of Congress to share with you our deep concern for the people of Kandhamal district in eastern Orissa who were attacked by the supporters of Swami Laxmanananda Saraswati in December 2007, and again in August 2008 following the Swami's tragic death at the hand of the Maoists. It is with great sorrow that we reflect on these planned attacks on the Christian minority community, in Kandhamal and the suffering the community has experienced since. Given the strong relationship between the United States and the Government of India, we sincerely hope that you will continue to do all in your power to bring to justice the perpetrators of these heinous crimes and ensure that the victims are able to return to their homes and live without fear of further persecution or attack.

Union Home Minister P. Chidambaram's recent apology for what he referred to as an inadequate government response to the violence last year in Orissa, as well as his willingness to re-visit the anti-conversion laws for the benefit of all members of faith is an encouraging step toward justice for the victims of these attacks. We appreciate the new government's commitment to protecting the rights and freedoms of all religious minorities and we look forward to working with you in any way we can in this regard.

It has been almost two years since the December 2007 violence in Kandhamal which left at least four Christians dead, rendering thousands homeless and destroying approximately 730 houses and 95 churches. Moreover, it has been approximately a year since the Swami's murder and the planned attacks of August 2008 which left over 90 innocent civilians murdered and many more who disappeared, with 18,000 people injured and at least 53,000 people displaced. The August 2008 attacks also forced Christian Kondhs and Panos out of approximately 450 villages, leaving approximately 4,900 homes, 150 churches and 13 educational institutions desecrated.

We are deeply concerned that those responsible for the violence remain at large, intimidating and threatening the victims and other witnesses. Despite the establishment of a government commission to address cases filed in December 2007, they unfortunately did not make any report or begin to hear cases before the violence re-ignited in August

2008, and the fast-track courts established to pick up where they left off have yet to bring justice to any of the victims.

Of those who filed First Information Reports (FIRs) with the police, we were deeply concerned to learn that some Christians were turned away, while others were threatened to withdraw their cases. Moreover, of the more than 750 cases that were filed in various police stations in Kandhamal and neighboring Gajapati district, we understand that only 24 people have been convicted, while at least 95 suspects have been acquitted.

It has even been reported that Hindu extremists have threatened to kill witnesses, while Christians are living in an extremely hostile environment in Kandhamal. Of the 27,000 people who found shelter in 15 relief camps, it has been reported that few have returned to their villages out of fear, while most have been forced out of the relief camps, many of which were closed as early as October 2008 while attacks continued to occur. Reports indicate that at least 600 people were forcibly converted to Hinduism when they tried to return to their homes, often upon threat of death.

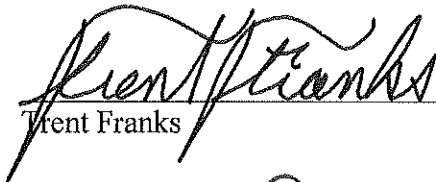
Given the compromised situation many of the Christians from Kandhamal appear to find themselves in after almost two years of insecurity and injustice, we would like to know what the Government of Orissa is doing to

- enable the victims to file FIRs, including through legal assistance, and provide them and other witnesses protection while these cases are being adjudicated;
- establish peaceful conditions in their villages and assist them in returning to their homes without being threatened;
- hold the perpetrators of these planned attacks accountable while the cases are being processed;
- work with the Central Bureau of Investigation to investigate the activities of the Bajrang Dal, Vishwa Hindu Parishad, and other Hindu extremist groups involved in planning and carrying out the attacks in Kandhamal;
- utilize laws to address communal violence against the Christian community and create an early warning mechanism to address calls to violence against all religious and ethnic minorities from Hindu extremist groups and organizations to prevent further attacks;
- ensure that Hindu extremist groups are not using conversion to Hinduism as a stipulation for those Christians who fled to be allowed back into their villages; and finally,
- to ensure that law and order is established so that Christians and all other minorities are able to live without without fear of religious, political and economic persecution in their villages in the future.

We have written the Government of India on several occasions about the planned attacks in Kandhamal over the past two years and remain deeply concerned that violence such as this against a particular religious community must be taken very seriously by the international community. Such attacks on the fundamental freedom of religion threaten not only India's reputation for religious diversity, but also the very stability of India's secular democracy.

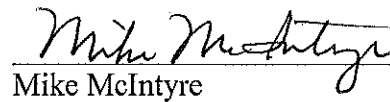
Given the recent experience with religiously inspired terrorism, we are concerned that if Hindu extremists can act with impunity toward religious minorities in India, these extremists and their ideologies will begin to affect international security as well. We thank you for your consideration of our genuine concerns for the people of Orissa and look forward to learning more about your efforts to protect the people of Kandhamal and bring justice to the victims.

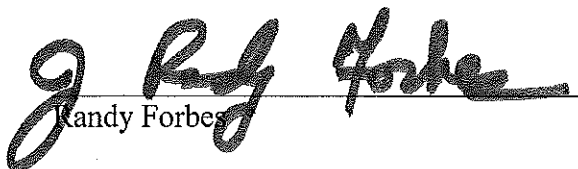
Most sincerely,



Trent Franks

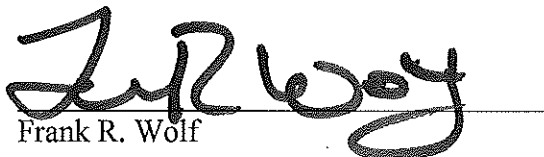

Emanuel Cleaver, II


Joseph Pitts


Mike McIntyre

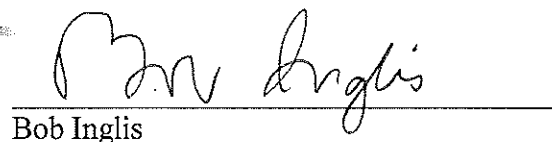

Randy Forbes


Michele Bachmann

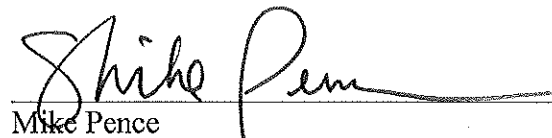

Frank R. Wolf

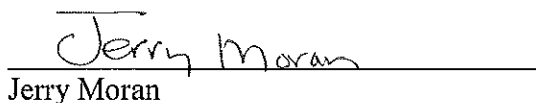

Christopher H. Smith

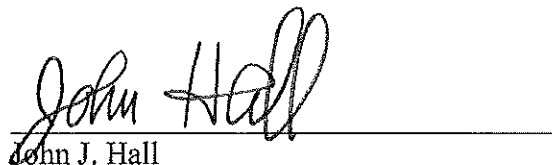

Dan Burton

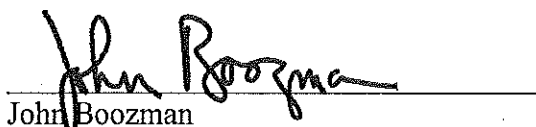

Bob Inglis


Todd Akin


Mike Pence


Jerry Moran

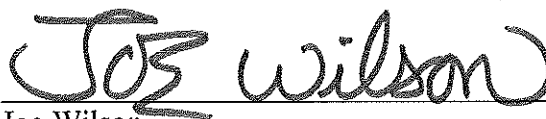

John J. Hall


John Boozman

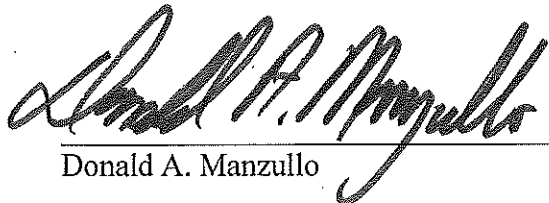

Doug Lamborn



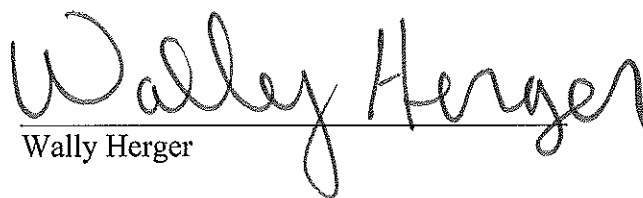
Senator Tom Coburn



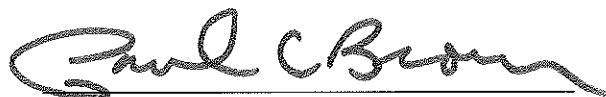
Joe Wilson



Donald A. Manzullo



Wally Herger



Paul C. Broun

Cc: The Prime Minister of India, Dr. Manmohan Singh
U.S. Ambassador to India, Timothy J. Roemer